



THE

# KNIGHT



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## PORTRAIT/BEAST AND TARTAR TAMGA COINS

Aleksandras Radžius

These are exciting times in Lithuanian numismatists! Medieval coins previously unknown are being found on a regular basis! Though presenting challenges in attribution and interpretation, they offer the potential of deepening our understanding of early Lithuanian history as well as give us the opportunity to see how medieval Lithuania culture influenced neighboring cultures and vice versa.

One such new coin has the portrait of a crowned monarch on the obverse and on the reverse is a beast and a Tartar tamga. Such a coin first came to the attention of Lithuanian numismatists in 1976 when one was found during an archeological dig at the Narkūnai fortified hill-mound (Lith. piliakalnis) in the Utena region, just southwest of the city of Utena. Another was a chance find in the city of Utena and still another was found in 1999 during an archeological dig at the Šeimyniškeliai fortified hill-mound. Another is housed in the Lithuanian National Museum, though the location of the find is unknown. Another had been housed in the Vilnius Byelorussian Museum, though only a pencil rubbing of it now exists. And 18 were in a hoard of 63 coins found during an archeological dig at the Vilnius Lower Castle on July 4 and 5, 2002. Later, on September 10, 2002 one more coin was found in the area where the first 18 were discovered. Then, on April 18, 2003 five more were discovered at the northern base of Gediminas Hill. And on April 2, 2004 one more was discovered in the northeast area of the Vilnius Lower Castle, where the Royal Residence is being reconstructed. In 2005, 5 more were offered for sale on the internet but 4 of these were intercepted and documented. Thus, at least 35 coins of this type are known to exist, for 34 there are images and weights for 33. There are other in the hands of private collectors that have not been documented, thus not available for numismatic study. Current Lithuanian law stipulates that archeological finds are the property of the land owner on which the item was found and not that of the



finder. Consequently, coins discovered with metal detectors are being sold to collectors without revealing the location of the find and valuable numismatic and historic information is thereby lost.

Illustrated below, twice actual size, are all the known coins of this type with the weight of each, were it has been reported. The codings of the Vilnius Lower Castle hoard coins are as presented in Eduardas Remecas's report on the find.



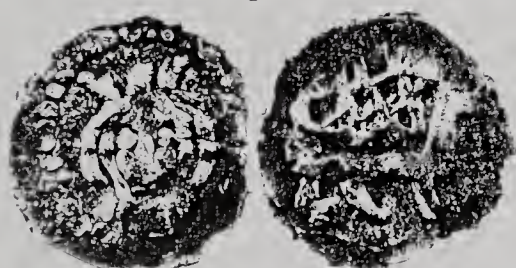
Narkūnai  
16.18 grains  
(1.0435 grams)



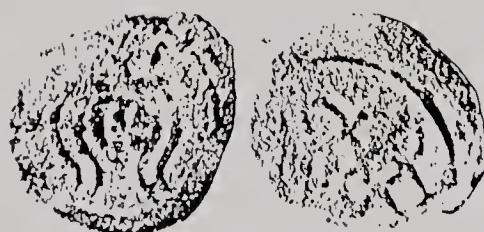
Utena  
8.67 grains  
(0.562 grams)



Šeimyniškeliai  
11.25 grains  
(0.729 grams)



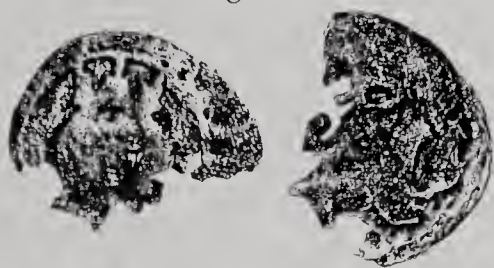
Lithuanian National Museum  
10.45 grains  
(0.677 grams)



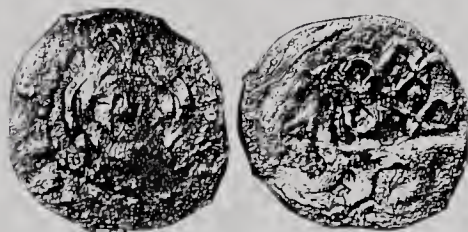
Vilnius Byelorussian Museum



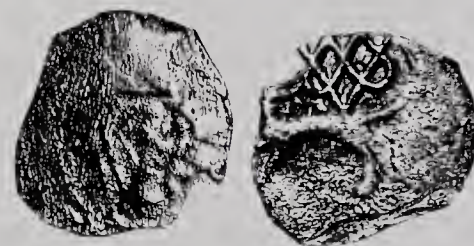
Vilnius hoard 1.1-I  
8.94 grains  
(0.579 grams)



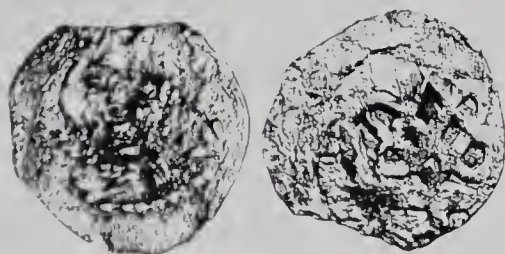
Vilnius hoard 2.2-I  
4.44 grains  
(0.288 grams)



Vilnius hoard 3.3-II  
8.02 grains  
(0.520 grams)



Vilnius hoard 4.4-II  
6.88 grains  
(0.446 grams)



Vilnius hoard 5.5-II  
6.11 grains  
(0.396 grams)



Vilnius hoard 6.6-II  
5.39 grains  
(0.349 grams)

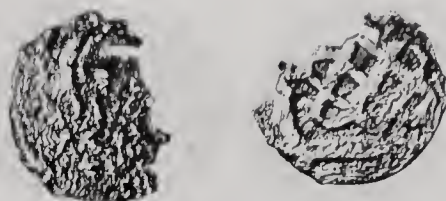


Vilnius hoard 7.7-II  
4.61 grains  
(0.299 grams)





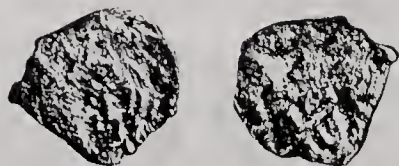
Vilnius hoard 8.8-II  
3.84 grains  
(0.246 grams)



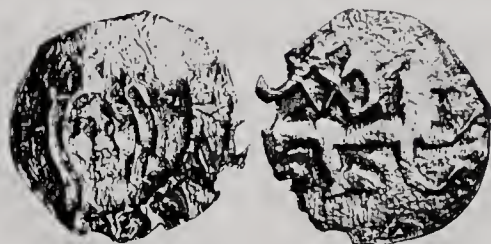
Vilnius hoard 9.9-II  
3.33 grains  
(0.216 grams)



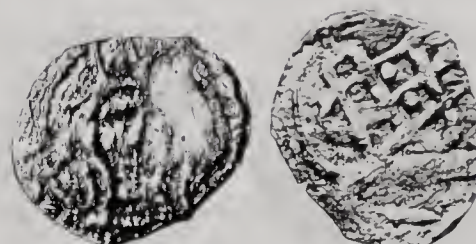
Vilnius hoard 10.10-II  
1.91 grains  
(0.124 grams)



Vilnius hoard 11.11-II  
1.71 grains  
(0.111 grams)



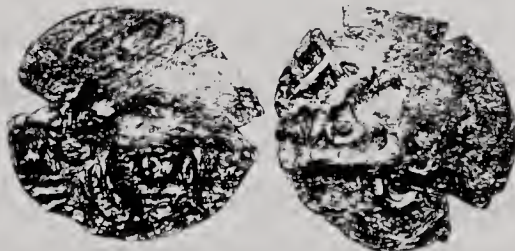
Vilnius hoard 12.12-III  
6.989 grains  
(0.452 grams)



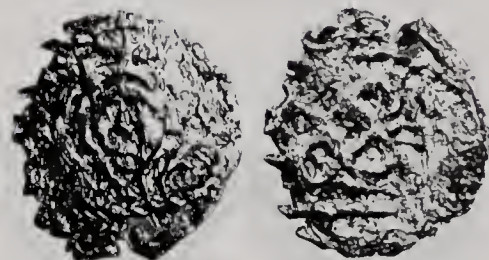
Vilnius hoard 13.13-III  
5.09 grains  
(0.330 grams)



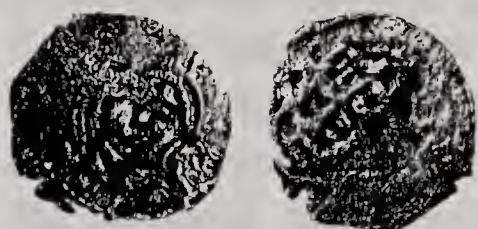
Vilnius hoard 14.14-III  
4.89 grains  
(0.317 grams)



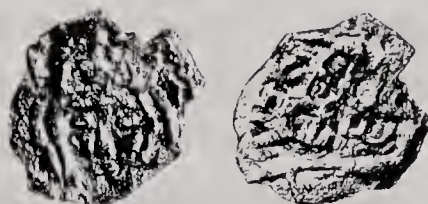
Vilnius hoard 15.15-III  
4.74 grains  
(0.307 grams)



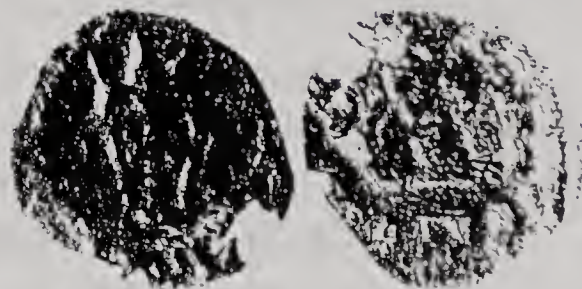
Vilnius hoard 16.16-III  
3.44 grains  
(0.223 grams)



Vilnius hoard 17.17-III  
3.10 grains  
(0.201 grams)



Vilnius hoard 18.19-III  
1.40 grains  
(0.091 grams)



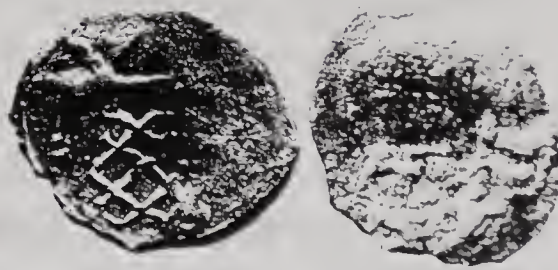
9/10/02 Vilnius hoard area  
7.73 grains  
(0.501 grams)



Gediminas Hill  
11.07 grains  
(0.717 grams)

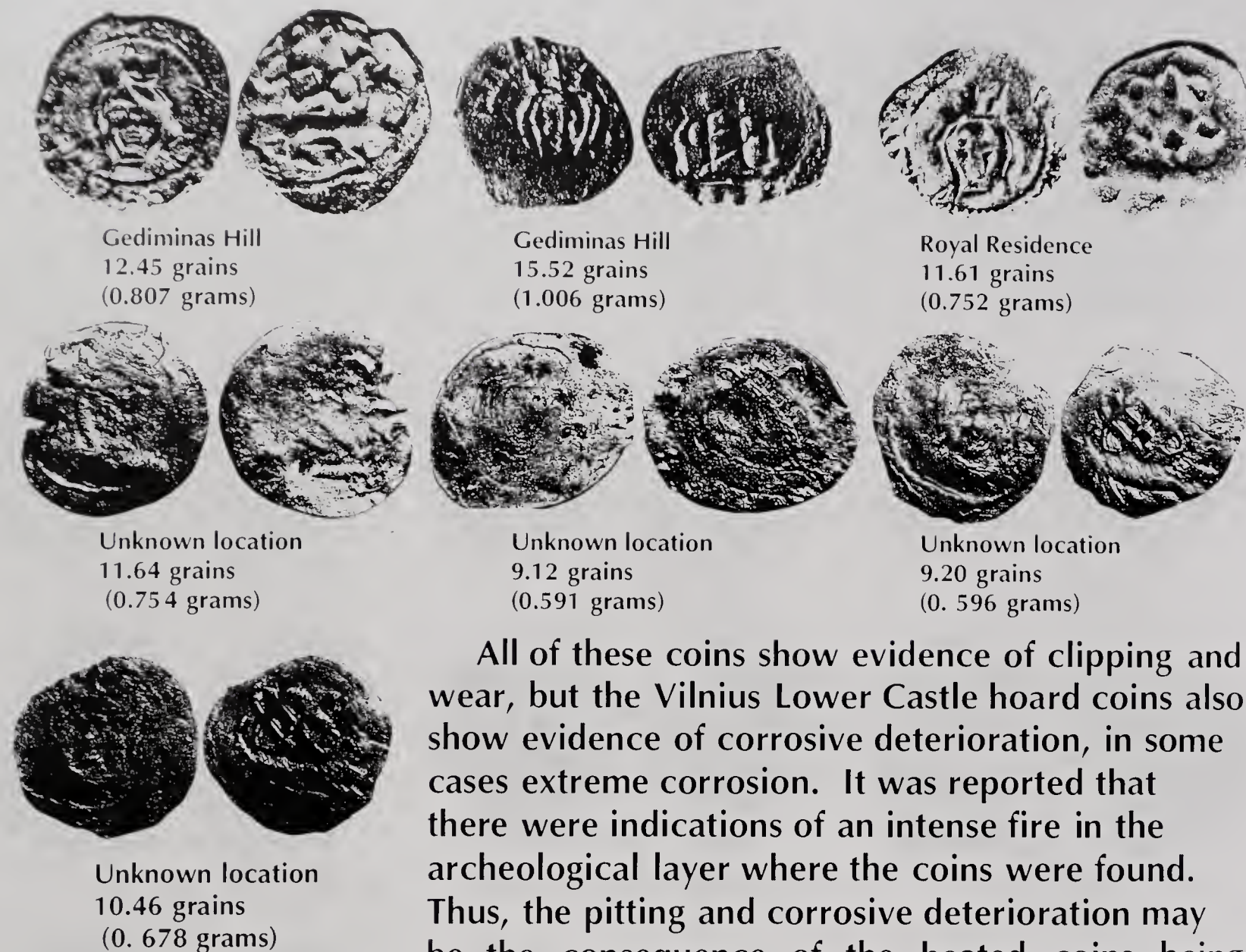


Gediminas Hill  
12.30 grains  
(0.797 grams)



Gediminas Hill  
12.44 grains  
(0.806 grams)





All of these coins show evidence of clipping and wear, but the Vilnius Lower Castle hoard coins also show evidence of corrosive deterioration, in some cases extreme corrosion. It was reported that there were indications of an intense fire in the archeological layer where the coins were found. Thus, the pitting and corrosive deterioration may be the consequence of the heated coins being

rapidly quenched with water as the fires were being put out and immediately being covered with ash laden soil. We know that in 1390 Lord Vytautas and the Teutonic Order burned a good portion of Vilnius and burned the Twisted Castle (Lith. Kreivoji Pilis) to the ground. Further, the area where these 18 were found is at the juncture of the Neris and the Vilnia Rivers, in relatively moist soil, a situation which could enhance the corrosive actions on the coins during the 600 years they were buried.

The value of species coins, unlike today's fiat money, was determined by the weight of the coins. Due to clipping, wear and corrosive deterioration, the raw weights of all the coins illustrated can not be indicative of the actual weights of the coins at minting. Work will have to be done to estimate and correct for the mass lost from the time of minting to when the coin was found. However, the universal unit in the natural system of weights and measures (egostically called the "English System" by the English speaking



cultures), the pennyweight (24 grains, about 1.6 grams), must be kept in mind as a benchmark point of reference for coins of the period.

These surviving coins reveal that a number of die varieties were used for both the obverse and the reverse. Specifically, the portrait of the monarch shows variation in implementation as well as in relative size. The beast on the reverse sometimes looks mamalian, sometimes serpentine, sometimes facing heraldic right, sometimes heraldic left. A number of stylistic variation of the tamga are also evident. Such a variety of dies suggests that either a great quantity of the coin type was produced at one time or that the coin type was issued over a long period. New finds and continue study of these coins might shed light on these two possibilities. However, the fact that most of the coins known to date have been found on the Vilnius Castel grounds is of no significance. All were chance finds, not the consequence of a systematic sampling effort. Thus, any inference based on the locations of the finds flies in the face of statistical sample methodology. Of course many coins, of any type, can be expected to be found at the center of the political power! If the locations of other undocumented finds were known, a better assessment of the distribution in circulation of these coins might be revealed.

Though all of the known coins are in a rather poor state, some of the coins show evidence that, at least on the obverse, there had been a legend, e.g., the coin from Narkūnai as well as the coins from the Vilnius Hoard 1.1-I, 2.2-I, 3.3-II, 6.6-II, 8.8-II, 12.12-III, etc. Speculations had been offered that the legend was 'MAGNUS DUX', 'REX POLONIA', 'WLADISLAUS REX P', 'MAGNA REG IHA', 'JAGAL MAGNUS REX', 'MAGNA REGINA'. In the September-October 2004 issue of 'The Knight', a straight forward and a reproducible methodology was used to piece together fragments from a number of coins and reconstruct the legend. Clearly, the same methodology should be applied to this coin, assuming enough information can be obtained from some of the coins illustrated above. Thus, until the legend is successfully reconstructed or until a coin with a clear legend is found, all of these proposed legends must remain unsubstantiated speculations.

The portrait of the crowned monarch is of no help in either identifying the issuing monarch nor when the coin was first minted. The knee-jerk reaction that the crown indicates that minting was begun after King Jogalia had also became king of the Poles in 1386 is unsupportable from surviving period historical data or by common sense. However, the fixation some

Lithuanians have with the title MAGNUS DUX and the total misunderstanding of the title REX POLONIA is outside the scope of this work and will have to be addressed at a later date.

To assess when these coins were first minted, some realistic economic and political power considerations must be appreciated. The main source of revenue for the kings of Lithuania was the tax collected from the trade route between the Baltic and the Black Seas. It was only when King Jogaila was offered and accepted the throne of Lachia (now called Little Poland), that a reliable and a steady source of revenue, the 'king's fifth' from the salt mines near Cracow, became available to a Lithuanian king.

But, appreciating the chaos that existed in Lachia, Polonia and Masovia from centuries of feuding between the Piast Lords, Jogaila could not have survived in Cracow, let alone make good on his 'king's fifth', if he did not have a dependable viceroy to govern his Lithuanian Empire. His first viceroy was his younger brother Lord Skirgaila/Skirgaila. However, Lord Vytautas, now with the Teutonic Order, was a continuing source of instability for King Jogaila.

Further, since the minting of coins is not only a profitable enterprise, but also an expression of independence, and in view of the trouble Jogaila had in establishing his dominance from the start of his reign, it is doubtful that King Jogaila would have permitted Skirgaila to mint his own coins in Lithuania. Jogaila could not have afforded such an any expression of independence from Skirgaila.

Forced to make peace with Vytautas after Vytautas's disastrous raid into Lithuania and on Vilnius in 1390, Jogaila chose to replace Skirgaila with Vytautas as viceroy in Lithuania in 1392. Wanting only to regain Trakai, but being given all of Lithuania to rule instead, no doubt, had the effect of healing many wounds suffered by Vytautas at the hand of his cousin Jogaila. Giving Vytautas free reign in Lithuania, Jogaila was now able to deal with the Polish Piastes and continue his work towards the total destruction of the Teutonic Order. Though Lord Vytautas had his nobles proclaim him King of Lithuania in 1398 on the Island of Salinas, Vytautas and his Tartar ally Lord Tokhtamysh lost the Battle of Vorskla (August 12, 1399) to the Tartar Lord Edigu. Barely escaping with his life, Lord Vytautas had to renew his pledge of fidelity to King Jogaila.

Thus, taking into account real economic and political consideration, and considering that Vladimirus Algirdaitis reigned in Kiev 1362-1394, the most

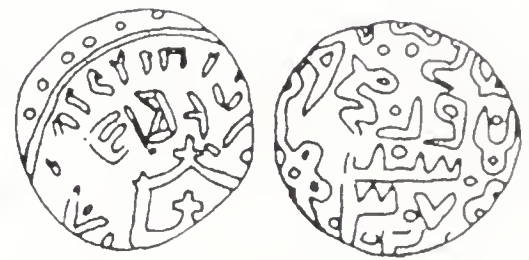


likely start of the minting of the portrait/beast-tamga coins is during the reign of King Jogalia during the period 1377 to 1386. And, the most likely owner of the tamga was Mamai of the Blue Horde (1362-1380/1381) or Tokhtamysh of the White, and later of the Golden, Horde (1378-1395).

But again, we will know for sure only when the legend of the coin is reliably determined and/or when the Tartar owner of the tamga becomes known. Until then, all is speculation.

To make matters even more interesting, coins have been discovered with the same beast and tamga on reverse, but with lettering and markings on the obverse which are

reminiscent of the markings on a coin of Vladimiras Algirdaitis, Lord of Kiev 1362-1394. These newly discovered markings/beast-tamga coins also show evidence of severe clipping which hinders in the determination of their relationship to the portrait/beast-tamga coins.



Above, coin of Vladimiras Algirdaitis. Left, markings/beast-tamga coins. Note similarity of markings on obverses of both coin types.



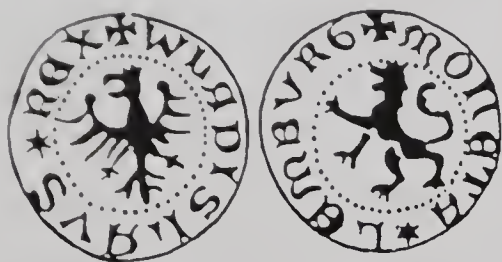
Another coin recently found bears the personal arms of King Jogalia on the obverse, a heraldic Apostolic Cross, and on the reverse, a, beast with a counterstamp on its breast.

The personal arms of King Jogalia identify this coin as having been minted by King Jogalia.

The beast on the reverse is similar to the beasts on other coins discussed above. And, even though neither the head of the beast nor the area where the tamga would have been located can be made out, this coin adds weight to the the argument that the portrait/beast-tamga coins were minted by King Jogalia.

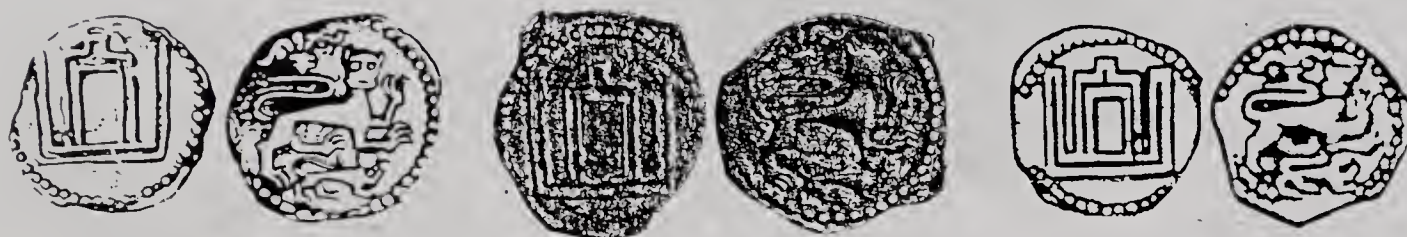
So as to have a more comprehensive assessment of these coins, a coin of King Jogalia for the Galician (contemporary Ukrainian) city of Lvov (Germ. Lemburg) and coins of Great Lord Vytautas have to be considered for comparison. Each of these types of coins have a beast on the reverse which is unmistakably mamalian, specifically feline - a lion. The tail of the Lvov

coin is rather normal, but on the two coin types of Great Lord Vytautas the lion's tail end in fanciful floral design.



King Jogalia's coin for the city of Lvov in Galicia (Ukraine). The legend reads: WLADISLAVS REX MONETA LEMBVRG.

Further, although the author at this time does not know when the Kingdom of Bohemia (contemporary Czech Republic) adopted the rampant lion with a split tail for its coat-of-arms, the fanciful ending of the tail must be noted. Clearly, the depiction of a beast with a fanciful ending for its tail spans a number of cultures bordering the Tartar



Examples of a coin type of Great Lord Vytautas.



Another coin type minted by Great Lord Vytautas.

Empire. Given that a lion is taken to be the arms of Genghis Khan's dynasty, the use of a beast/lion on the reverse of coins and the depiction of its tail in a fanciful ending must be assessed from, and in, the context of Tartar culture.

Thus, in the portrait/beast-tamga type coin we have a Lithuanian coin not known prior to 1976, but which, in the ensuing 30 years, has gone from a unique find to a collection of 35 specimens. This type of coin, when fully studied, will expand, and, hopefully, place our understanding of the kingship of Jogalia in Lithuania into a more realistic political and economic perspective. Also, this coin has the potential of helping us to better assess the relationship, both political and economic, between the medieval Lithuania and the Tartar Empires.

## ROBBING LITHUANIA DURING WWII

As you look at, and handle, the banknotes and coins in your collection issued by the Republic of Lithuania during its period of independence from 1918 to 1940, know that you are gazing on the salaries, savings and hopes for the future of your forebearers - parents, grandparents or relatives. Know



that Lithuanians immigrants to the United States, on returning to Lithuania, converted their savings from US dollars into these banknotes and coins at a rate of about 1 US dollar to 10 Lithuanian litai. This was the currency with which they hoped to leave their inheritances to their children. But World War II changed all.

Before the War, the Lithuanian litas was converted to the Russian ruble at a rate of one litas to 3 to 5 rubles. Also, the German mark was worth about 2.5 litai. Thus, 3 to 5 Russian rubles were worth about 0.4 German mark, or 7.5 to 12.5 Russian rubles per German mark.

After the first Russian occupation of 1940, the Russians forced Lithuanians to convert their litai to the Russian ruble, not at the pre-war market rate, but at a greatly inflated rate of 10 litai to 9 rubles. Thereby, the Russians stole between 70% to 78% of all the money Lithuanians had at the time.

However, during the first year the Russian occupied Lithuania, 1940-1941, they appropriated agricultural production worth 2,000,000,000 pre-war Lithuanian litai. Thus, after stealing most of the money Lithuanians had, the Russians continued to plunder what Lithuanians produced on their farms.

When the Germans occupied Lithuania in 1941, they exchanged 10 Russian rubles the Lithuanians now had to use for one German mark, that is, at about the mean pre-war exchange rate. But on their part, the Germans during their 3 year occupation, 1941-1944, appropriated agricultural production worth 5,575,000,000 pre-war Lithuanian litai. Thus, the both the Russians and the Germans robbed Lithuanian at the about the same rate with respect to farm production.

Source: Brazaitis, Juozas. *Vienų Vieni*. Vilnius 1990. ISBN 5-89942-568-7.

## TO UNBEG THE LITAS FROM THE EURO - A TRAGEDY

As reported in the March 23, 2007 issue of 'Emigrantas', Reinoldijus Šarkinas, Chairman of the Bank of Lithuania, says that to unbeg the litas from the euro and to let its exchange rate float would be a tragedy. Talk about unpegging have been going on since December 2006 as a means of controlling inflation. "The exchange rate of the litas will remain stable with respect to the euro until the introduction of the euro," says R. Šarkinas. According to Gintanas Nausėda, advisor to the Chairman of the Bank of Lithuania, the best conditions will be in place by mid-2009 for the determination if the euro will be introduced in Lithuania.



## LETTERS

I just wanted to let the readers of 'The Knight' know that I was invited and gave my talk about kapos/grivnos on April 28 at a meeting of the International Primitive Money Society, which took place during the Chicago International Coin Show.

The formal title of my presentation was "Silver Currency Ingots of Northern Europe, 800-1450 AD." This is an expanded and updated version of the presentation that I did at the Balzekas Museum, and which was videotaped. The attendance was good, with questions lasting for a full half hour. I also displayed my collection of these ingots.

- Dr. Audrius Plioplys, Chicago IL.

## WANT/FOR SALE ADS

WANTED: Picture postcards of Lithuania, Klaipėda/Memel, pre-1941 only. J.R. Greene, 26 Bearsden Road, Athol, MA 01331.

WANTED: Lithuanian coins prior to 1708, especially gold. Please write with what you have for sale. Tony Tumonis, P.O. Box 89792, Tucson, AZ 85752. E-mail: Lith57@aol.com.

WANTED: Lithuania 1923 First National Census badge. Frank Passic, 900 S. Eaton St., Albion, MI 49224. E-mail: Albionfp@hotmail.com.

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## LETTERED EDGE 1936

### 10 LITU BLANK

Recently in the numismatic press there has been quite a bit of publicity about U.S. unstruck Presidential dollar blanks with the lettered edge intact accidentally being released into circulation.

In this editor's collection is a blank, unstruck silver Lithuanian 1936 10 litų planchet bearing the lettered edge. The edge reads, "VIENYBĖJE TAUTOS JĖGA", meaning "In Unity Lies the Strength of the Nation."



The lettering on this piece however is wide and deep. The lettering on struck circulation pieces, however, is narrow and shallow. This reveals that the lettering was placed on the planchets before being struck, and that striking the design on the coin compressed the lettering on the side.

This particular blank has what is sometimes referred to as the "piecrust" effect around the rim, which consists of small rounded raised points adjacent to where letters appear, such as you would view around the rim of a piecrust.

Illustrated here is this editor's piece. This photo was specially taken in order to show the entire lettered edge condition. It was shot using the cone of a flashlight. The lettered edge is actually the reflection coming from the flashlight cone itself. Try doing this with one of your coins sometime.